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Indictments in 'plot' against Pope are only the tip of an iceberg

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The details made public so far in the alleged plot to kill the Pope are only the beginning.

Further information will emerge when the full text of Judge Ilario Martella's report is made available.

Judge Martella, who last week in Rome brought an indictment against seven men in the 1981 attempt on the life of Pope John Paul II, has been investigating the case for three years. His report substantiates a complex conspiracy and a close Bulgarian connection to it.

The most sensational revelation in his 1,243 page report is the conclusion that Mehmet Ali Agca not only did not act alone, but also that his alleged accomplice, Oral Celik, actually shot at Pope John Paul II, grazing his hand and arm.

ANALYSIS

This conclusion is based on ballistic tests, exhaustive review of eyewitness accounts of the shooting, and study of photographs collected worldwide by the Italian authorities from persons who were in St. Peter's Square the afternoon of May 13, 1981.

In addition to Mr. Celik, two Bulgarians were in or near the square at the time of the shooting, according to the report. Their alibis that they were elsewhere were examined carefully by Martella. He found they did not hold up.

Italian lawyer Giuseppe Consolo, however, still insists that Martella's case is based only on Mr. Agca's own confessions, which he says are inconsistent and deliberately misleading. Mr. Consolo is the Italian lawyer hired to represent Sergei Ivanov Antonov, a Bulgarian imprisoned in Rome for almost two years and named in the indictment.

But Martella's report, and the text of the indictment issued on Oct. 26, against three Bulgarians and four Turks speak for themselves.

Trials in Rome are expected to begin no sooner than February 1985 and could continue for a year or more.

Martella accepted nothing Agca said without painstaking investigation and cross-checking. This is why the whole process took three years. The plot he details will rank as one of the most meticulously researched conspiracies of the 20th century. His work will probably prove more comprehensive than the Warren Commission investigation of the assassination of President John F. Kennedy.

Where is Celik, the man now accused of shooting at the Pope? Escaped without a trace, perhaps in a sealed customs-cleared Bulgarian trailer truck that departed Rome the evening of the shooting. Most probably it took him to Bulgaria where, if he is still alive, he is most likely living under a new identity.

Celik has been under indictment in Turkey since early this year. At that time, Mafia godfather Aubuzer Ugurlu and 23 others, only 12 of them actually in Turkish custody, were put on trial for having instigated Agca's first political killing: the 1979 murder of newspaper editor Abdi Ipekci.

Martella's report shows Celik to be a figure almost as interesting as Agca himself. Was Celik actually a member of the Turkish right-wing terrorist group, the Gray Wolves — or, like Agca, merely disguised as one? When and how was he drawn into the Bulgarian-supported web of Turkish Mafia operations that included drug and gun smuggling as well as political assassinations? Answers to these questions will no doubt emerge in due course.

In an interview with the respected Italian daily *Corriere della Sera*, Judge Martella said he had not assigned responsibility in his report to "any government or any nation because I am not in possession of objective evidence that would allow me to formulate such an accusation."

This is a proper legal position. But the enormous amount of evidence in Martella's report that Bulgaria was directly involved in the alleged plot, together with the indictment of three Bulgarians in the case, tends to confirm the view that Bulgaria itself played a role in the attack on the Pope and bolsters the argument that the attack was Soviet-sponsored.

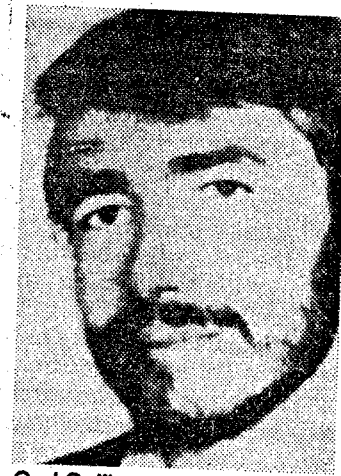
Bulgaria's denial of involvement in the shooting of the Pope is as hard to believe as Bulgarian denials of its alleged involvement in several other conspiracies in Italy

which are also under investigation. And it is hard to justify a purely Bulgarian rationale for its deep entanglement in arms and drug smuggling over the past 20 years, an entanglement that has come to light as a result of investigations and trials in Italy and Turkey over the last three years. Bulgaria must have been operating on behalf of its Russian masters.

Martella's report, incidentally, provides concrete new detail on another previously shadowy Bulgarian, Ivan Tomov Dontchev. (He disappeared earlier from the Italian scene.) Mr. Dontchev appears to have been linked to the aborted scheme, described by Agca to Italian investigators, to kill Polish Solidarity trade union leader Lech Walesa during his visit to Rome in January 1981.

Dontchev may, in fact, have been the top Bulgarian intelligence operative in Italy at that time.

Though Martella has chosen to make no charges in connection with the alleged attempt against Mr. Walesa, his report provides solid evidence of such a plot. The process of getting Agca to talk about it was interrupted by the still unsolved kidnapping of Emmanuela Orlandi,



Oral Celik

Continued

daughter of a minor Vatican official, in June 1983.

According to the interpretation of this evidence given by Claire Sterling in an Oct. 27 New York Times story, there is solid reason to believe that the Orlandi kidnapping was a last-ditch effort by the Bulgarians (and perhaps the Soviet secret police, the KGB) to try to revive the discredited notion that the attempt on the Pope's life was the work of Turkish fascists or Islamic fundamentalists.

The Soviet and Bulgarian reactions to the indictments by Martella have been instructive. The official Soviet news agency Tass, which claims the Martella report was received by the Italian public "with indignation," has repeated the tired, incredible allegation that the US Central Intelligence Agency masterminded the plot to kill the Pope. And Bulgaria accused Martella of engaging in "a political conspiracy against Bulgaria and socialism instigated by the US and NATO."

It is surprising that Sofia and Moscow did not prepare a more convincing rebuttal of the charges contained in the indictment. Martella's report has been expected since June, when Italian state prosecutor Antonio Albano issued a summary of the case.

And the present heightened tension in Poland underscores Moscow's inability to bend that country to its will. That remains one of the prime facts — and dangers — in international relations today.

"The kidnapping of Solidarity supporter Fr. Jerzy Popieluszko, who is now believed dead," says veteran Polish observer Jan Nowak, "can only be explained as the result of intrigue by hard-liners in Poland — possibly supported by KGB elements in Moscow — to provoke an outburst against [Polish chief of state Gen. Wojciech] Jaruzelski. Fr. Popieluszko's prestige inside Poland is comparable in a way to the Pope's standing worldwide as a man of courage and integrity."

What is to be done? The question is being asked with an increasing sense of urgency in free-world capitals.

Former National Security adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski has called for a total economic boycott of Bulgaria.

Many in Washington, both in and outside the administration, find the State Department's passive stance, as expressed by spokesman John Hughes last Friday, inadequate. He praised the Italian investigation as "determined and conscientious" but said the US would have no further comment until the Italian courts reached a verdict.